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Kalalau Trail improvements completed

By Tom Finnegan - The Garden Island

After months of complaints about treacherous conditions, overgrown areas and washed out parts, Kauai's most famous hike, the Kalalau Trail, got a much-needed spruce-up recently.

And, according to state officials, it was thanks to a bunch of volunteers.

A crew of five Hunakai Plantation volunteers cleaned up a particularly difficult stretch of the trail recently, camping out for a night with four state workers to fix up the path.

Natalie Boca took two completely different hikes along the Kalalau Trail this month, just two weeks apart.

"They really made a big difference," Boca said this week. "It was nothing like how it was two weeks ago."

"It was so nice. I didn't even have to worry," Boca added. Before, "you really had to be careful. It was slick, really dangerous" between the seven- and eight- mile markers on the trail.

"They totally dug in to the mountain," she said. "It was still muddy, but I wasn't worried about slipping off the mountain."

The men who fixed up the trail earlier this month were Weslie Aguinaldo, Reynan Aguinaldo, Wilson Aguinaldo, Jerrold Sagucio and Steven Lopez, Kilauea residents, said their boss, Benjy Garfinkle, owner of Hunakai, a land-management company.

"We were just trying to help out," said Garfinkle, who set up the work with officials with the state Department of Land and Natural Resources. "If I can help, I'm happy to donate the money, energy, and time. It's a national treasure."

And he hopes that this is a beginning of a partnership.

The state "has been pretty receptive and responsive to me," said Garfinkle. "We were pretty psyched to pull it off."

Next year, he said he hopes to get carpenters into Miloli'i Beach to build a platform for a portable bathroom. State officials have had the Miloli'i area closed to camping for a few years because of lack of bathroom facilities.

And by donating the carpenters' work hours and perhaps the helicopter travel, he hopes that he can help re-open that beautiful part of the state park.

"We worked on it (with state officials) and got it approved," he said. "I would like to do it a few times a year."

State officials are also excited about the partnership. "We consider this an example of concerned citizens stepping up to manage Hawaii's valuable resources," said state Board of Land and Natural Resources Chairperson Peter Young.

All Boca knows is that it's easier to get to that beautiful beach at Kalalau.

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Enjoying the view: A volunteer crew from Hunakai Plantation takes a break from the backbreaking work of repairing a section of the Kalalau Trail that had been the subject of many letters of scorn to state officials.